

## Message Text

SECRET

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11

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W

----- 124196

R 311159Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6106

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION USUN

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 568

EXDIS

KUWAIT ALSO FOR BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, US

SUBJ: SYRIA AFTER THE UNSC DEBATE: PROSPECTS FOR SYRO-

US COOPERATION

SUMMARY. NO ONE EVER SUGGESTED IT WAS EASY TO  
COOPERATE WITH SYRIA BUT PROSPECTS EXIST.

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END SUMMARY.

1. WITH 1976 BARELY UNDERWAY, USG HAS ALREADY HAD ITS FIRST CONFRONTATION WITH SYRIA IN YEAR WHICH PROMISES MANY MORE OF SAME. SC DEBATE ENDED IN RELATIVE CIVILITY, DESPITE SYRIAN ROLE PLAYING OF THE TART-TONGUED DAVID AGAINST OUR GOLIATH HERE AND IN N.Y. HAVING PUBLICLY BLAMED WASHINGTON FOR SABOTAGING PEACE PROCESS, FIRST BY SPONSORING SINAI II AND NOW BY OUR SC VETO, SYRIA IS MOVING SWIFTLY TO REVIEW ITS OPTIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION AT SC AND/OR UNGA TO ADVANCE PALESTINIAN CAUSE. THEIR ESTIMATE OF WHAT WE MAY BE READY BILATERALLY TO DO ABOUT THE PLO COULD BE KEY FACTOR IN THEIR CALCULATIONS.

2. SC DEBATE WAS IN MICROCOSM A REFLECTION OF NEW ME REALITY THAT SYRIA, TRADITIONALLY MORE ADEPT AT STAKING OUT THE HIGH GROUND OF NON-NEGOTIABLE PRINCIPLE, HAS BEGUN TO BE INTERESTED IN INITIATING PRAGMATIC, COOPERATIVE EFFORTS WITH OTHER PARTIES DIRECTLY CONCERNED IN PEACE PROCESS. BEFORE AND EVEN DURING DEBATE IT MAY HAVE MISJUDGED THE DISTANCE SEPARATING SYRIAN AND AMERICAN POSITIONS, ALTHOUGH WE SPARED NO PAINS TO WARN DAMASCUS OF THE LIMITS BEYOND WHICH WE COULD NOT GO. NONETHELESS, DURING DEBATE SYRIAN MOVED--AND APPARENTLY BROUGHT PLO ALONG--TOWARDS MORE EXPLICIT RECOGNITION, WITHIN TERMS SC RES 242, OF ISRAEL'S SOVEREIGNTY THATN EITHER HAD PREVIOUSLY VENTURED.

3. SYRIA HANDLES ITS CLAIM TO A GREATER LEADERSHIP ROLE IN ARAB WORLD CLUMSILY ALTHOUGH IT IS DOING BETTER WITH ITS IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORS AND THE PLO THAN FURTHER AFIELD. HOWEVER, IT LACKS EXPERIENCE AT COOPERATION FOR REGIONAL STABILITY, WITH POSSIBLE EXCEPTIONS OF HANDLING RELATIONS WITH AMMAN AND THE LEBANESE CRISIS ON WHICH ALL RETURNS ARE NOT YET IN. IT HAS MANAGED TO INFURIATE AND THOROUGHLY ALIENATE EGYPT IN COURSE OF LAST FIVE MONTHS OF ATTACKS ON SINAI II. ELSEWHERE IN ARAB WORLD, ITS LEADERSHIP CLAIMS SEEM TO BE  
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HEAVILY DISCOUNTED. SYRIA'S HAMMERING ON THEMES OF EGYPTIAN "TREASON" AND NEED TO PRESSURE USG HARDER SEEM TO FATIGUE MORE THAN TO STIMULATE ITS OIL-RICH PENINSULA COUSINS. THEY ARE READY TO SUPPORT DAMASCUS FINANCIALLY BUT OTHERWISE TREAT SYRIA CAUTIOUSLY AND REMAIN UNPREPARED TO FOLLOW ITS LEAD. MUCH OF SYRIAN DIPLOMACY IN RECENT MONTHS BOILS DOWN TO A SCRAMBLE TO AVOID

ISOLATION IN THE REGION.

4. SYRIA IN 1976 PROMISES TO BE NO EASIER FOR US, OR ANYONE ELSE, TO HANDLE THAN IN THE PAST. ON PLUS SIDE DAMASCUS CLEARLY STILL WANTS A POLITICAL SOLUTION OF ME CONFLICT AND DOES NOT SEEK A RENEWED MAJOR WAR WITH ISRAEL. BUT CHANCES FOR ITS MISCALCULATION ARE HIGHER THAN EVER. UNDOF RENEWAL IN LATE MAY MAY PROVE FIRST MAJOR TEST THIS YEAR OF ITS ABILITY TO AVOID SERIOUS ERROR, ASSUMING THAT EVEN BEFORE THEN THE LEBANESE CRISIS DOES NOT RE-IGNITE. (SYRIAN LEADERSHIP THEORETICALLY COULD MANAGE RENEWAL BY PUBLIC PLEDGES OF FIERCE POLITICAL BATTLES FOR PALESTINIAN CAUSE IN COLOMBO NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE AND LATER AT UNGA; BUT WE CANNOT PREDICT WITH CERTAINTY IT WILL NOT LAUNCH SOMETHING EVEN MORE AWKWARD FOR US.)

5. ASAD STARTS THE YEAR WITH HIS PERSONAL LEADERSHIP INTACT AND EVEN STRENGTHENED. HE CAPPED HIS FIFTH YEAR IN POWER WITH GESTURES TOWARD STRENGTHENED TIES WITH BOTH SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN. BUDGET SQUEEZE AND CASH-FLOW PROBLEMS HAVE INCREASED LEADERSHIP'S AWARENESS OF ITS DEFENSE BURDEN, AND PROBABLY REINFORCED ITS INTEREST IN CONTINUED SEARCH FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO ARAB-ISRAEL CONFRONTATION. SYRO-SOVIET TIES REMAIN OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE TO DAMASCUS GIVEN ARMS SUPPLY LINK, BUT SYRIAN COMMITMENT TO SOVIET UNION IS OPPORTUNISTIC AND LOCAL COMMUNISTS CHAFE UNDER RESTRAINTS.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W  
----- 124306

R 311159Z JAN 76  
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6107  
INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY JIDDA  
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AMEMBASSY TEHRAN  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI  
AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
USMISSION USUN

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 568

EXDIS

KUWAIT ALSO FOR BAGHDAD

6. SYRO-US BILATERAL RELATIONS ARE STILL CHARACTER-  
IZED BY UNUSUAL FRANKNESS, AND DAMASCUS, RECOGNIZING  
OUR ESSENTIAL ROLE IN PEACE PROCESS, REMAINS KEEN TO  
KEEP CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION OPEN. HOWEVER,  
SYRIA HAS AT TWO CRUCIAL POINTS LAST YEAR SHOWN  
THAT ITS FRANKNESS DOES NOT EXTEND TO PRIOR POLICY  
COORDINATION. FIRST, WHILE IT SPOKE OF  
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ITS UNHAPPINESS AT PROSPECT OF SINAI II, IT NEVER  
HINTED THAT IT WOULD REACT SO VIOLENTLY ONCE  
ACCORD WAS SIGNED. NOR DID IT FOREWARN US THAT IT  
WOULD IMPOSE CONDITION OF SHARING WITH PLO ITS  
OWN POTENTIAL NEGOTIATIONS IN STEP BY STEP PROCESS.  
SECOND, IT SPRUNG TACTIC OF TYING UNDOF  
RENEWAL IN LATE NOVEMBER TO SC DEBATE WITHOUT PRIOR  
WARNING. AT TIMES, IT SEEMS OUR FRANKNESS IS RE-  
SERVED FOR PERIODS OF CLEARING UP THE DEBRIS AFTER  
THE EXPLOSION OF SYRIAN DIPLOMATIC TIME BOMBS.

7. OUR AID PROGRAMS AND SYRO-AMERICAN CUL-  
TURAL TIES ARE DEVELOPING IN ACCORDANCE WITH  
LEADERSHIP'S DESIRES TO INSULATE THESE BILATERAL  
RELATIONS FROM ITS REACTIONS TO OUR ROLE IN THE  
PEACE PROCESS. LATTER, HOWEVER, REMAINS THE ONLY  
SIGNIFICANT TOUCHSTONE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP.

8. FOR NOW, SYRIA REMAINS IN "MODERATE" CAMP,  
WITH PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS, LIBYANS AND  
IRAQIS TO ITS LEFT. AS IT ENTERS FOURTH DECADE  
OF INDEPENDENCE, SYRIA SHOWS SOME ENCOURAGING  
SIGNS OF SETTLING DOWN. ITS MIDDLE AGE STILL  
PROMISES TO BE A RADICAL ONE BUT THE PROSPECTS  
FOR OUR CONTINUED COOPERATION IN THE SEARCH FOR  
PEACE ARE NONETHELESS EVIDENT.  
MURPHY

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